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SUBJECT: PM FICO ON AFGHANISTAN, SIS, CORRUPTION, U.S. VISIT

REF: BRATISLAVA 966

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

Afghanistan

¶1. (C) On the margins of a three-hour long Christmas party he hosted December 18 for the diplomatic corps, Prime Minister Robert Fico told the Ambassador he was determined to travel to Kahdahr, Afghanistan in mid-January. He reiterated his invitation to the Ambassador to join him (reftel). Meanwhile, Defense Minister Frantisek Kasicky told the press that PM Fico would not make a decision on moving troops from Kabul to Kandahar until March. (Comment: It appears Kasicky and Fico are conspiring on the "surprise" trip and announcement. Fico's invitation to the Ambassador seems designed to test the seriousness with which the U.S. views the move and its NATO partnership with Slovakia.)

Keeping Politics Out of the Intelligence Service

¶2. (C) HZDS leader Vladimir Meciar is determined to appoint a HZDS nominee as the Deputy Chief of the Slovak Intelligence Service. Fico is equally determined to prevent this, and SIS Chief Jozef Magala has reportedly vowed privately to tender his resignation rather than accept a HZDS deputy. During the week of December 11, HZDS MPs blocked several other coalition nominations in the last parliamentary session to force Smer back to the negotiating table to reopen the SIS issue. HZDS Vice-Chair Milan Urbani recently told the Ambassador that SIS was tapping HZDS members' phones, and it was necessary to have some HZDS "control" in the SIS. At the Christmas party, Fico told the Ambassador that he absolutely would not accept a HZDS nominee into the SIS directorate, and asked the Ambassador to intervene with HZDS to get Meciar to back down. (Comment: Our message to all parties is that we want a professional, capable intelligence service with which we can cooperate on important issues such as terrorism, and that we do not want to see the SIS become a playing piece on the political gameboard.)

Fight Against Corruption

¶3. (C) Although Justice Minister Stefan Harabin (a HZDS appointee, though not a party member) is determined to shut down the new Special Court for Corruption, Fico was adamant that it will be preserved, albeit with some modifications. He told the Ambassador his top anti-corruption priority was to shake free the Law on the Origin of Property, which is held up in the Constitutional Court. This law, passed by the former coalition government with Smer's support, requires public officials to make public the source(s) of their

wealth. Immediately after passage, however, a group of MPs challenged its constitutionality. Fico claims Constitutional Court judges loyal to SDKU and KDH are holding the law hostage, so that it cannot be used to expose the corruption of the Dzurinda government. He told the Ambassador that Meciar was a huge thief, but the corruption of Dzurinda and his ministers made Meciar look like a petty criminal in comparison.

Visit to Washington

14. (C) Fico repeated that he plans to visit Washington to speak to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (reftel). Contacts in the AmCham in Slovakia have told us the date is flexible, and might be pushed back to February.

15. (C) Reiterating what he told the Ambassador privately (reftel), Fico told the entire Ambassadorial Corps that he definitely would not run for the prime minister post again in 2010. (Comment: We continue to be skeptical.)
VALLEE